

**Title:** Textile Testimonies: Memory and the Continuity of Arpilleras

**Credits:** Created by Emily Vo, HIST 2715 (Spring 2025)

**Description [Home Page]:**

Welcome to the digital exhibit Textile Testimonies: Memory, Solidarity, and the Continuity of Arpilleras! The creation of this site serves as a final project for HIST 2715: A Global South: Chile, the Pacific, and the World, Cornell University. This digital exhibit was largely influenced by Chapter 1: The Texture of Memory and Chapter 4: Weaving My Story from *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love* (The Arpillera Movement in Chile) by Marjorie Agosín. In addition to Professor Marjorie Agosín's writing, my thoughts surrounding the relationship between arpillera scholarship and arpilleras were influenced by the testimonies of Violeta Morales and Anita Rojas (*Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*) as well as *Arpilleras and the Vessels of Chile's Resistance* (Soledad Fátima Muñoz). The arpilleras within this digital exhibit are mainly from *Arpilleras, Colección del Museum de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos*, physically housed in Santiago, Chile. To view the materials, visit the Browse page. To read more, visit the About page.

**Writings/Justification [About Page]:**

*"Arpilleras teach us the difficult art of living with memory."*

*Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*

*On the Organization of Digital Exhibit and Subject Tags*

I divided my items into three categories, which I have organized into "Subject Tags" under the Subjects page. They include "Threading Injustice", "Resistance Embroidery", and "Arpilleras Today". For each item, I assigned one of the three subject tags. Although most of the items are arpilleras directly taken from *Arpilleras, Colección del Museum de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos*, I included images or pictures taken from the in-person trip to Valparaíso. This approach was taken because I wanted to organize the different ways in which arpilleras both told stories and bared witness- to see the differing styles and political messages behind common themes. For instance, under the Arpilleras Today tag (which I hope to upload more), I wanted to include the ways that arpilleras might be engaged with through recent political struggles and how the tradition is used to understand the ways that collective memory of the dictatorship, and subsequent international attention and human rights campaigns, translates to Chilean solidarity with contemporary political movements and transnational solidarity against U.S. imperialism. In *Arpilleras the Vessels of Chilean Resistance*, Soledad Fatima Muñoz speaks on the ways in which arpilleras are inextricably linked to the economic violences of neoliberalism, implemented during the dictatorship, and the instances in which the art and language of arpilleras deconstructs capitalist and western hegemonic ideas. Through this, the tradition of arpilleras becomes integral to examining memory. Often, the study of memory is constructed through the experiences of secondary witnesses — those who look to primary actors of historical events to understand their meaning — which can risk leaving behind individuals with lived experiences and testimonies. This, of course, is not the case in all forms of

memory work or engagements with collective memory, but by producing a secondary or rigid construction of living memory certain historical narratives sponsored through institutions, states, or even academia are prioritized.

Perhaps by looking at arpilleras through their relationship to themes of political memorywork may give us insight into frameworks for understanding the decisions and deliberate messages of each individual arpillera. Although the work to de-anonymize the collection of arpilleras is an ongoing process through strides of oral history and testimony, I thought it would be interesting to delve deeper into how the arpilleras in each individual tag might relate to one another across the categories but also how they are distinct through their messaging.

Though this digital exhibit does not answer all (or perhaps most) of the questions deeply, I believe the discussions around historical memory, contending with violence and justice, and gendered frameworks of political organizing are deeply essential in the consideration of curation toward decolonial memory studies.

#### *Subject Tag: Threading Injustice*

For this subject tag, I choose arpilleras that were made distinctly with the means to document the crimes of humanity and injustices carried out by the military regime under Pinochet. In the collection of Isabel Morel (in the book *Arpilleras, Colección del Museum de la Memoria y Los Derechos Humanos*), many of the arpilleras depict the brutal torture, execution, as well as psychological violence (of disappearances and detention) that were forcibly enacted on to families and victims themselves. These depictions were integral in disseminating the reality of the dictatorship to the wider international community, but they also serve as a reminder of the ways fear and oppression contributed to the human rights violation to be carried out and even allowable and the pain that many families and individuals were subjected to and permanently carry within themselves and through generations.

#### *Subject Tag: Resistance Embroidery*

In this subject tag, I choose arpilleras that depicted the ways families or individuals resisted political repression or produced alternative avenues for basic living essentials and community. I was most interested in how different forms of arpilleras might show different forms of organizing or labor (scenes that are woven include communal soup kitchens, caring for infants, hospital visits, and traditional song and dance) that was carried out in spite of the military regime's social and political repression. But, also how it actively preserves memories of living through this time and a way to rethink history and break away from merely being considered a "memory" or passive tool to remember, going beyond stagnation and using these art forms in pursuit of memory with conscience and pathways for meaningful reconciliation- whether that means leaving behind the political and economic legacies of the dictatorship.

In addition to preserving these memories, arpillera workshops were similar acts of organizing themselves and I wanted to include workshops that many arpilleras organized to share stories, learn, and teach one another.

#### *Subject Tag: Arpilleras Today*

For this subject tag, I choose arpilleras that were on exhibit at the *Parque Cultural de Valparaíso-Ex Cárcel*. In addition to these arpilleras I hope to include more recent works, especially originating from the 2018 General Feminist Strike. But, for now, I used the photos I had taken during the short-term study abroad trip to Chile. The arpilleras and exhibit signage under this tag incorporates how arpilleras and the tradition of its creation, context, and embodiment are instilled and sustained today.

### *On Memory and the Global South*

In Victor Jara's popularized song *El Derecho Vivir en Paz* he speaks largely in the context of Viet Nam and the decolonial struggles of this era. Although written and released before the 1973 Coup, Victor Jara as well as the overall New Chilean Song movement also speak to frameworks of political art and memory. I connected with this, not explicitly to arpilleras, but to how arpilleras and its movement might build on Chilean identity and its relation to the world, particularly to a positionality of the Global South. This idea of solidarity, like various other meanings of freedom and justice, are not forwardly defined or agreed upon. But, it is nonetheless a core aspect of memory from and within the Global South. Though it would be impossible to compare arpilleras with other textiles used as a form of protest, in *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*, Agosín makes a connection to similar threads in the agency of storytelling (Agosín 2007, 19). From war rugs of Afghanistan to Hmong textiles during the war in Viet Nam, the use of fabric and physical manifestations of violence and turmoil are both components of how the legacies of arpilleras and similar forms of textile contribute to a spoken history told by weaving. Though not singularly defined by just those in the South, these textiles, especially arpilleras, contribute to a historical narrative that intertwines Chile into the broader, international struggle for sovereignty and liberatory practices. Often these memories become entangled and through this process we might be able to ask how these violences, struggle for human dignity, or even the dictatorship did not simply happen to Chile but rather how this influences the narrative beyond Chile and its part of political memory in Latin America and reorientation toward agency in the Global South. The continuity of arpilleras and its tradition is essential in this memory.

### **Additional Resources Section & Citations**

This work draws from a rich scholarship on arpilleras and the arpillera testimonies and political memorywork over the past decades. Research of the Chilean arpillera movement and its deep avenue of resistance under the Pinochet dictatorship has been intricately studied through the context of memory and art. It is because of this that the materials for this digital exhibit as well as resources on arpilleras are able to be presented. I wanted to list some of the materials I looked at when I was first constructing the site:

Agosín, Marjorie. *Tapestries of hope, threads of Love: The arpillera movement in Chile*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

*Digital Collection and Exhibition: Arte, Mujer, Y Memoria: Arpilleras from Chile (Museum of Latin American Art, November 23, 2019 – September 6, 2020)*

“Arte, Mujer y Memoria: Online Exhibition - MOLAA: Museum of Latin American Art.” MOLAA. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://molaa.org/arpilleras-online>.

Castillo, Oscar, and Paloma Ruiz. “Forging Memory.” La Faena: Arpillera Workshop | Forging Memory. Accessed May 11, 2025.  
<https://forgingmemory.org/narrative/la-faena-arpillera-workshop#:~:text=Arpilleristas%20of%20met%20in%20small,threat%20to%20General%20Pinochet's%20government>.

Fátima Muñoz, Soledad. “Arpilleras the Vessels of Chile’s Resistance.” *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, October 15, 2020.  
<https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.tsasp.0091>.